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By Dan Maines

Galatians 4

Galatians 4:1-2

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave, although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.

† Paul illustrates with an heir under guardianship, not yet free, though destined for inheritance.

† Israel under the Law was like a child under guardians until the appointed time.

† Josephus (Antiquities 4.8.14) noted Israel's strict guardianship under the Law, mirroring Paul's metaphor.

Galatians 4:3

So we too, when we were children, were held in bondage under the elementary principles of the world.

† The Law represented the basic elements, keeping Israel bound in spiritual childhood.

† Christ came to release them from this bondage.

† The Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS 3.20) spoke of being bound by spirits until release, echoing Paul's view.

Galatians 4:4-5

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons and daughters.

† Christ came at the exact appointed time in history.

† Born under the Law, He redeemed those bound by it.

† Redemption led to adoption as true heirs of God.

† Irenaeus (Against Heresies 3.16.3) emphasized the fullness of time as God's perfect plan.

Galatians 4:6-7

Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

† The Spirit within cries out to God as Father, showing intimacy of adoption.

† Believers are no longer slaves but heirs.

† Origen (On Prayer 23.2) saw "Abba" as the Spirit's work testifying to true sonship.

Galatians 4:8-9

However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles, to which you want to be enslaved all over again?

† Paul rebukes their return to bondage under Law and pagan customs.

† The Law, when elevated, became as empty as idolatry compared to Christ.

† Tertullian (Against Marcion 5.4) warned of the danger of returning to worthless elements.

Galatians 4:10-11

You meticulously observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

† Observance of Jewish calendars was a regression into slavery.

† Christ fulfilled the Law's times and seasons.

† Josephus (Wars 6.9.3) recorded the destruction of Jewish observances at the fall of Jerusalem, confirming Paul's warning.

Galatians 4:12

I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong.

† Paul appeals personally, urging them to imitate his freedom in Christ.

† He reminds them of their past kindness to him.

Galatians 4:13-14

But you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time, and you did not

despise that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition, nor express contempt, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself.

† Paul's illness led him to Galatia, yet they received him with honor.

† Their reception showed sincerity in the beginning.

† Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History 5.1) noted Paul's sufferings, highlighting God's power through weakness.

Galatians 4:15-16

Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I testify about you, that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?

† Paul laments their change from blessing to hostility.

† The truth often provokes resistance, even from those once zealous.

Galatians 4:17-18

They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they want to shut you out so that you will seek them. But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you.

† False teachers courted them to enslave, not to edify.

† True zeal must be consistent and grounded in Christ.

Galatians 4:19-20

My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you, but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, because I am perplexed about you.

† Paul's anguish is like labor pains for their maturity in Christ.

† His perplexity shows the seriousness of their wavering.

Galatians 4:21-23

Tell me, you who want to be under Law, do you not listen to the Law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and one by the free woman. But the son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.

† Paul uses allegory from Abraham's sons to show the contrast between Law and promise.

† Ishmael represents bondage, Isaac represents freedom.

† Philo (On the Migration of Abraham 177) also contrasted the sons of Abraham, though not as Paul does.

Galatians 4:24-26

This is speaking allegorically: for these women are two covenants, one coming from Mount Sinai giving birth to children who are to be slaves, she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is enslaved with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, she is our mother.

† Hagar symbolizes Sinai and earthly Jerusalem, enslaved under Law.

† Sarah symbolizes the heavenly Jerusalem, the covenant of freedom.

† The Dead Sea Scrolls (4QFlorilegium) likewise contrasted earthly and heavenly realities.

Galatians 4:27

For it is written: "Rejoice, infertile one, you who do not give birth, break forth and shout, you who are not in labor, for more numerous are the children of the desolate one than of the one who has a husband."

† Isaiah 54:1 is applied to Sarah as the mother of the free, expanding to Gentiles.

† Paul shows fulfillment of prophecy in Christ's people.

Galatians 4:28-29

And you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time the one who was born according to the flesh persecuted the one who was born according to the Spirit, so it is even now.

† Believers are children of promise, heirs with Isaac.

† As Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so Judaizers persecuted Christians.

† Josephus (Antiquities 1.12.3) recounts the rivalry, showing the tension Paul applies spiritually.

Galatians 4:30-31

But what does the Scripture say? "Drive out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman." So then, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free woman.

† Paul commands separation from the Law's bondage.

† Believers belong to the covenant of freedom, not slavery.

† Augustine (On Galatians 28) affirmed the allegory, freedom through Christ alone.

How it applies to us today

† Galatians 4 shows the Law was bondage, but Christ brought freedom.

† Believers are heirs of promise, not slaves under Sinai.

† The Jerusalem above, the true church, is the mother of the free.

† In the fulfilled kingdom, freedom in Christ replaces bondage to Law, and we live as children of promise.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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